

R&D INSIGHTS

THE LATEST UPDATES ON R&D WITHIN THE OLIVE INDUSTRY | JUNE 2026



R&D Insights contains the latest levy-funded R&D project updates, research findings and related industry resources, which all happen under the Hort Innovation Olive Fund.

Hort Innovation partners with leading service providers to complete a range of R&D projects to ensure the long-term sustainability and profitability of the olive industry.



Update on 2026 AOA National Olive Conference

By this time of year, the Australian Olive Association (AOA) would normally have released details of the annual National Olive Conference & Exhibition. Unfortunately, a number of factors currently affecting our industry have necessitated a logistical reconsideration of this year's event.

Global disruption, local uncertainty

AOA CEO Michael Southan said the most significant is the disruption to the global fuel supply chain, which has already impacted via higher fuel and fertiliser prices.

"With the Middle-East conflict ongoing, the longer-term impacts are uncertain," he said.

"The Federal Government is sourcing additional fuel shipments where possible. The most difficult impacts of the current situation have not yet arrived, however, and there is no certainty regarding the fuel supply situation by October.

"Not surprisingly, many olive growers have reported that fuel is currently

the most significant issue for their business - both the increased cost and ongoing availability.

Fiscal responsibility

"Considering these practical challenges facing growers and industry participants, the AOA Board and conference organisers have determined that it is not viable to lock in a national conference this year. A centralised gathering would be impossible if fuel restrictions are in place later in the year, and fiscal responsibility to our members means the risk of losing the necessary substantial event deposits is not acceptable.

"It's important to note also that, even if the supply restrictions were to lift by July or August, the months of planning required, along with the scarcity of specialised venues and locations to suit our three-day event, make a 2026 conference unrealistic. Delivering the quality event our industry expects simply isn't possible in this window."

Alternative options

Southan said that while a physical national gathering is not possible, the AOA recognises the importance and value of knowledge sharing and networking via industry events.

"The organising team has therefore been "thinking outside the square" since the fuel crisis arose, and has prepared concepts for several alternative options based on different year-end scenarios. The AOA is ready to pivot to the most suitable option," he said.

"A final decision on these alternatives will be made and communicated in the new financial year, when there is more clarity around the fuel situation in particular.

"And we're already looking ahead to 2027, when we'll return to our traditional event format of field day, plenary sessions and trade exhibition, providing myriad opportunities to learn, interact and network."

The annual National Olive Conference is facilitated by the Australian Olive Association, partially funded by Hort Innovation using the Olive R&D levy, with in-kind contributions from the Australian Olive Association and funding from the Australian Government. The event is also supported by industry sponsors and exhibitors.



Best-practice olive growing and processing in action

If you want to learn how to grow great olives and make high-quality olive oil, sign up for the Australian Olive Association's knowledge-sharing events.

That's the feedback from attendees at the recent Back to Basics Field Day and Olive Oil Processing Workshop, held in April as part of the AOA-run industry *Communications and Extension Project*.

The two events were held consecutively at award-winning producer Rio Vista Olives' Mypolonga, South Australia grove and production mill.

It was an outstanding venue for the processing workshop in particular, as the well-spaced equipment allowed all attendees to see the processing operation safely. Presenter Pablo Canamasas was also appreciative of the input from Rio Vista's expert mill operators with modifications to the process which needed to be applied on the go.

Enthusiastic attendance

AOA CEO Michael Southan said the opportunity to learn from some of the industry's best was a big drawcard, with maximum numbers achieved for both events despite the current fuel situation.

"I was pleasantly surprised to see the numbers that attended - that in the midst of a global fuel crisis people were willing to travel substantial distances to come to these events. Many who had registered were from interstate, so I thought we'd have a lot of people drop out, but they all came," he said.

"A number had also attended the processing course before, which demonstrates how much value people get out of it. The opportunity to learn from Pablo Canamasas is just too good to pass up: he always does an amazing job of sharing what is really pretty complex information, and people go home with the knowledge and confidence they need to take their processing to the next quality level.

"And running the Back to Basics field day alongside it this year worked really well. It value-added the travel



Canamasas stressed that successful processing starts with a thorough assessment of the fruit.

and the timing was ideal, as leading into harvest people were inspired to learn more about planting and growing olives.

"Many of the attendees were new to the industry, so it was really great to see the growing level of enthusiasm for the industry."

Getting 'the good oil'

Victorians Ben and Leanne Koutoukidis were two of those – new to growing, that is, as they already know a lot about olive oil.

While they're yet to be involved in the production side of the industry, Ben and Leanne run *The Good Oil Club*, providing premium imported Italian olive oils to members while also promoting the flavour and health benefits of EVOO. Internationally-trained olive oil sommeliers, they recently joined the Wagga Wagga tasting panel and are looking at planting their own grove in the future. In the meantime, they're about to lease part of an abandoned grove.



Harvesting and pruning demonstrations were a highlight of the field day.

They attended both AOA events “to get our heads around what we need to consider and how to do it properly,” and said they weren’t disappointed.

“There was just so much information - even more than what we were hoping for actually,” they said.

“And it was all very valuable: how to plant, what aspect, drainage, irrigation. Not just in general terms either: detail like picking a plot of land where the sun’s going to be hitting the grove; is your soil clay or sandy and then how do you treat it?; have we got water close by or if not, can we get it?”

“Having the industry providers there was great too, especially the demonstrations of the harvesting and pruning equipment. It was very cool to see the battery-powered secateurs -we want some of those!”

“The debate generated by attendees from different areas of production and sizes of operations make the whole experience even more valuable.”

‘Next level’ processing

Ben and Leanne were also impressed by the detail provided during the Processing Workshop.

“The processing course was next level,” Leanne said.

“I don’t know how Pablo has that much knowledge. He’s obviously very naturally good at it.

“We learned that they do it a lot differently in Australia and they do things here that they don’t do in Italy. In particular the use of talc - how they use that, how it doesn’t affect the flavour but helps extract the product. That was really interesting.”

Open information

What stood out most for them, though, was the olive industry’s ‘people factor’.

“My favourite thing about the industry is that they’re genuine people who genuinely love what they do and are happy to share what they know,” Ben said.

“We met some great people, including a couple of other growers who are currently leasing groves who we spoke to about their experiences.

“And the host, Leon from Rio Vista, was fantastic - so willing to share information on how they do things. There were no hidden secrets, they wanted to share everything to make sure that you were going to be successful doing it. It was just brilliant.”

Primed for action

Ben and Leanne said the amount of knowledge they gained has given them confidence to move forward with their grove plans.

“We came away with new ideas, new ways of approaching olive oil production and grove management, and the information we needed to make the right decisions. We’re ready to go now,” they said.

Which is why they say they’ll be recommending the AOA’s field events to others.

“If you’re thinking of getting into olive oil and you don’t do this, you’re crazy,” Ben said.

“We know someone else who’s considering planting olives and we’ll definitely recommend going to one of these before they plant. It gives you the information you need from the start, so you don’t have to make the mistakes and start again.

“They’d also really enjoy the day. It was all fantastic and I’d definitely do it again - in fact, I’d love to do one of these every year!”

Qualifying research

Paul Bridgeford is another industry newcomer and also attended both events. He’s getting ready to plant an olive grove in Port Fairy, Victoria, and was keen to confirm that his research would be good in practice.

“I’ve read a fair bit, so it was about talking to people and qualifying that information. I’m starting from scratch so I wanted to know what mistakes other people had made and what was effective,” he said.

“The introduction to olive growing the first day was very useful for that. I’ve had the soil tested and it seems it’s quite good for olives - I learned that from the field day. Also how to plant, and that spacing is obviously a major issue as well.

“If you don’t do all this preparation work then in four to five years’ time you can’t do anything about it, so I’m doing all of that now.

Varietal considerations

“I’m hoping to put in about 1000 trees and one of the other things I learned was to add in some table olive as well as oil varieties.

“It seems to me that if you put in a lot of different varieties you’re adding to the complication of the process, so I’ve tried to put in the minimum number. I’ve already been in touch with the Cobram nursery and have decided on Frantoio for oil, Manzanillo for table olives and Pendolino for pollination and visuals.”



Processing workshop presenter Pablo Canamasas and host Leon Bettio of Rio Vista Olives.

Processing preparation

Paul attended the processing workshop “to find out how it all happens”, and to do some important practical research around equipment.

“It was really like going back to school. A pretty full-on day and a half of information,” he said.

“There was a lot around technical issues, which to some extent were not as relevant to me, and a lot of the information was for if you’ve got a very big olive grove, but it was great that it was shared.

“And while I’d obviously start off much smaller, I needed to know about equipment because I’m getting permission for a shed and need to know the size I’ll need.”

Useful information

He learned a lot over the two events, both specific and general information.

“The key thing I learned from the oil processing is to start off with table olives, generate some income from that, then you’ll probably be able to afford the equipment you’ll need to produce the olive oil. There’s nobody around me processing so I’ll need to get my own: there were some suppliers there, so I got an idea of what sort of processing equipment you would need.

“I’ve also got a couple of bores and have put in an irrigation system, and I learned about using drippers.

“It was all very useful: I plonked a lot of the info into AI and it came up with a pretty impressive design for the grove.”

Key takeaways

Like Ben and Leanne, one of the biggest benefits for Paul was the opportunity to speak with other growers.

“I met people with varying sizes of groves and it was interesting talking to them,” he said.

“One guy only had 40 trees and another couple have just put in about 900, so I saw there are people who are doing what I’m doing. And that there is potential for a small olive grove, as obviously I’m looking at this as a business.

“The highlight was probably walking around the olive grove and the processing plant, and talking to people while we did that. Everything was pretty new to me and I learned a lot: discussing the spacing of



Industry service providers were on hand at the field day with information on the latest specialist equipment.

trees was great because it’s really important, especially for the potential to use a shaker in the future. Also using the raking system to start off with perhaps. It was all really good information.”

Important opportunity

Paul said he’d also recommend the AOA’s field days to others, particularly those entering the industry.

“These sorts of events are really important for communication with other people, and for picking up all those practical bits of information. For someone just starting off from scratch, that’s very important,” he said.

“And while the two days of processing was very intensive and quite tiring, there were lunches, and also a dinner on the first night, so I really enjoyed it. Overall it was terrific.”

Informative and well presented

Destiny Farms owner Carlo Ioppolo is at the other end of the spectrum experience-wise.

Based in North Boyanup, in southern WA, Carlo has been around olives all his life and is both a grower and contract processor. Having imported the first continuous olive processing plant in WA in 1998, Carlo now uses two different brands of processing equipment to process around 60,000 tonnes of fruit each year, for his own family business and growers across the region.

Despite that level of experience, he travelled across the continent for this year’s Processing Course and the opportunity to learn even more from Pablo. He wasn’t disappointed.

“It was all very informative and well presented,” he said.

“Most valuable were the session on

oil chemistry, and the setting up of equipment to suit specific batches of olives on the practical day. But it was all valuable and relevant to processing, and all worked hand-in-hand.

“We came away with new information, particularly more on oil chemistry and how volatiles play a role, and while we won’t be changing practices from what we learned, the information reinforces what we do and gives us more confidence moving forward.”

Wanting more

Carlo also had some constructive feedback for the organisers, which no doubt reflects on the scope of the information presented and attendees’ enthusiasm to fully utilise it.

“Question time could be better organised so as not to run short on time. Other than having a bit more time, though, I thought it was a great event.”



Second-season processor

Tamara Symington's experience level lies somewhere in the middle.

After dairy farming for 26 years, she and her husband now manage Telopea Downs in Victoria's Wimmera region. They moved there two years ago to expand the then 250,000-tree grove, which currently has 700,000 trees and will have close to a million by the end of the year.

They have a plant on site and Tamara processed for the first time last year, so she attended the AOA Processing Course to gain more experience "and as much information as I could get."

"My husband did the course the previous year but before experiencing his first harvest, so he feels the information was lost on him," she said.

"I'd at least done one so could understand what they were talking about. It was also right before harvesting so the timing was ideal."

Learning from experience

Tamara said the workshop was very comprehensive but she would have liked to learn more about what to do when things go pear-shaped during processing.

"We looked at the different issues with fruit - high moisture content or extremely ripe - and how to change your settings based on what you're seeing. Pablo did a great job of explaining that but there was also a lot more on trouble-shooting we could have touched on. I was hoping for that," she said.

"At the end of the day, the only way to learn to process is to experience

the difficult situations with difficult fruit and machinery breakdowns. That's what I got the most out of, I think.

"But there was plenty which I took away that I'll use. Mainly the intricate parts of the processing: your timing, really looking at your fruit and setting your plant to match your fruit to get the most out of your oils."

Grower interaction

Like the other attendees, Tamara said the opportunity to interact with other growers was one of the most valuable parts of the workshop.

"The highlight was meeting the people, swapping stories, listening to what they're doing - from small guys to big guys - and how they manage their groves. Everyone was lovely and really welcoming.

"I met someone who goes every year and is always learning something because technology changes. I want to do that too, to get the new information coming through."

Whole-of-industry benefit

It's not surprising, then, that Tamara was also keen to recommend the workshop to others in the industry.

"Definitely, even if you're already good at it," she said.

"It's also important for growers to understand the process, even if they're not processing, and to understand why it's important to have fruit at a particular stage. Helping growers know when to pick and process at the optimum time is how we'll raise industry quality.

"Overall, I was really happy with the event. It was really well set up and Pablo was a wealth of knowledge. It was a beautiful location and the host



The chance to speak with and learn from other growers is an integral part of the field events.

did a great job. It was also excellent value and the quality of the course was exactly that - quality all the way. I just wish I could have done the field day too."

"If you're thinking of getting into olive oil and you don't go to these events, you're crazy."



Keen to attend?

The AOA Processing Workshop is held annually in April, at varying locations. Further Back to Basics Field Days are also planned for Victoria and New South Wales in late-July/August this year.

If you're keen on attending, keep your eye on *Grove Innovation* and the *Friday Olive Extracts* e-newsletter for details - if you're not a subscriber, you can do so [here](#).

The AOA Processing Workshop and Back to Basics Field Days are part of the *Olive levy project Australian olive industry communications and extension program (OL22000)*, funded by Hort Innovation, using the Hort Innovation olive research and development levy, co-investment from the Australian Olive Association and contributions from the Australian Government.





Some samples in the latest round of testing failed both chemical and sensory testing, and displayed inaccurate best before dates.

Latest imported testing samples not up to Standard

The AOA-run project *Olive oil quality monitoring program* is now well into its second year, with 90 samples analysed. Previous rounds of testing have seen most oils meet the quality standards for extra virgin olive oil, however the latest has uncovered a disappointing trend.

AOA CEO Michael Southan said it's all about freshness - or rather, lack thereof.

"This batch of samples produced the worst results of any to date," he said.

"We again found issues with best before dates (BBD), where the labels aren't aligning with the calculated BBD based on the chemistry. More importantly, some of the oils were clearly rancid and had other sensory defects.

"A number also failed on the chemistry, so clearly were not Standard quality oils."

Compliance monitoring

The three-year project is monitoring compliance with the *Australian Standard for Olive oils and olive-pomace oils* (AS5264-2011), Australian Consumer Law and Food Labelling Regulations. It involves chemical and sensory testing of a cross-section of olive oils sold across retail, food service and other channels throughout Australia, and scrutinising of label information.

The aim is to ensure consumer confidence in the quality and value of olive oil, and to ensure that Australian producers can compete with imported oils on a level playing field.

It is also enabling the AOA to identify non-compliant products, and to

provide producers with assistance and information around quality improvement.

Australian quality 'perfect'

Southan said the latest batch of 22 samples was a 'mixed bag' but all were labelled as extra virgin.

"By chance, the majority were imported, along with four Australian. A number were organic," he said.

"What really stood out from the results was that those problems were found in the imported oils, while all of the Australian samples were perfect, including the BBDs."

Drought or storage issues

Southan said there could be several causes for the poor results.

"It could reflect the drought issues they had in Europe a couple of years ago, and that we're seeing the dregs of those bad oils," he said.

"It could also be related to poor storage and handling. The BBDs all being out means we're probably seeing old oils, and that's why we're seeing these defects. It's likely they were EVOO originally but they've deteriorated over time.

"Whatever the reason, the clear message for consumers is that if you buy local, you can be more certain that you're buying fresh oil."

Best practice storage and handling

Southan said the latest results highlight the importance of correct storage and handling procedures.

"The biggest issue we've found is oils no longer meeting the criteria for EVOO, despite BBDs into the future," he said.

"Now that the AOA has identified this, we'll be focussing even more on best practice bottling and storage in our extension work.

"Producers work incredibly hard making high-quality EVOO and it's heartbreaking to have it downgraded by poor storage and handling. It also challenges the reputation we've built around the quality and labelling credibility of fresh Australian EVOO.

"So we'll be emphasising the importance of having accurate BBDs and ensuring product has not expired, which maybe means further testing. And keeping it as a bulk volume with no head space until more stock is needed - in the dark, with no temperature fluctuations or oxidation. That's best practice care for your EVOO."

Industry assistance

The AOA has numerous resources available to assist producers with storage, packaging and best before dates, including:

[Webinar: Olive Oil Storage and Filtration \(Pablo Canamasas\)](#)

[Critical Control Points - EVOO](#)

[Olivegrower & Processor article: Packaging and EVOO quality](#)

[Determining shelf-life \(Leandro Ravetti\)](#)

There's also more great information available in the Resources Library of the AOA website [here](#).

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The Olive oil quality monitoring program (OL23002) is funded by Hort Innovation using the olive industry research and development levy, co-investment from the Australian Olive Association and contributions from the Australian Government.



Got an olive industry problem - and potential solution?

Submit your R&D project idea and help get it solved

The Australian Olive Levy has a really important purpose: to fund research and development to help improve the olive industry's viability and sustainability into the future.

Facilitated by Hort Innovation, Olive Fund R&D projects provide the knowledge, pathways and practical tools we need to grow better crops, produce better olive products and run smarter, more successful olive businesses.

Olive R&D projects cover a broad range of topics, from biosecurity and chemical permits to increasing awareness of the health benefits of Australian olive products, and the events and resources produced by the industry communications and extension project.

The olive industry IPDM (integrated pest and disease management) program was a stand-out past R&D project, producing the wealth of [detailed resources available to growers](#) on the [australianolives](#) website, as was the [OliveCare](#)® Code of Practice program.

Grower input welcomed

So how are the projects chosen? And more importantly, **can you input to the levy R&D program so that the problems you're facing get tackled?**

The answer is a definite **YES!**

As the people literally on the ground, and therefore experiencing any gaps in industry knowledge, resources or opportunities, growers and producers are encouraging to submit research or project ideas for consideration by Hort Innovation.

R&D investment process

Here's how the process works, step by step:

1. Each levy-funded investment starts with an idea.

Some come from Peak Industry Bodies (PIBs) or regional networks, others are identified via current project delivery activities, final reports or delivery partners. And of course they can also come from you.

Industry members are invited to submit their R&D project ideas to Hort Innovation at any time. You can do that in two ways: through the online [Grower investment ideas form](#) or directly to the Olive Industry Service Manager (ISM) Nicole Dimos Byrnes. In writing is best, emailed to nicole.byrnes@horticulture.com.au, or by phone on 0499 989 791.

You can provide as much detail as you want but as a minimum you should describe the issue (or opportunity) you'd like addressed, how it affects your business, and how Hort Innovation research, development or extension initiatives could address the issue.

For example:

"I don't know which olive variety is best to grow in my area to maximise the olive oil yield. A guide to top-performing varieties across Australia's growing regions would ensure more suitable new plantings and increased yields."

"Bird attack is decimating my crop but nothing I've tried works. A project identifying a practical, affordable method of bird control would increase my production dramatically."

You'll also need to provide your name and contact details so they can get in touch for more detail if your idea is progressed.

2. Suggestions/ideas are reviewed and assigned to the appropriate R&D manager for consultation.

Your idea will be reviewed to determine whether it aligns to the industry's Strategic Investment

Priorities (SIP). It will also be assessed around industry benefit and impact, including by the Olive Strategic Investment Advisory Panel (SIAP). The olive SIAP is made up of stakeholders across the industry, including levy-paying growers, and provides grower insights around strategic levy investments.

The draft investment recommendation covers the aims of the project, along with outcomes, deliverables and budget. The SIAP provides feedback and priority advice based on the potential impact of the project and available funding.

Recommendations from the SIAP, as well as other Expert Advisory Panels and Trade Panels where appropriate, are used by Hort Innovation to work suitable ideas into project proposals.

3. Projects are put to tender.

4. Responses are assessed and the best delivery partner for the work is chosen.

5. Contracts are issued, and the project begins.

*For those who prefer their information presented visually, the AOA has prepared a great infographic on the process, which you can access [here](#) along with more information on the Olive Levy.

Explore olive levy projects

For details of specific current and completed olive levy projects, visit the Olive Fund R&D page on the Hort Innovation website [here](#).



How to submit your ideas

1. Complete the online [Grower investment ideas form](#) [here](#).
2. Email your idea to Hort Innovation's Olive Industry Service Manager Nicole Dimos Byrnes at nicole.byrnes@horticulture.com.au



Video goes behind the scenes of the AIOA

The AIOA has released an informative new video, providing a 'behind the scenes' look at the annual Australian International Olive Awards (AIOA).

Comprehensive overview

Narrated by AIOA Organiser and Chief Steward Trudie Michels, the 12-minute video provides a comprehensive overview of the event - from the receipt of the first entries to the presentation of awards, and their subsequent impact for the winning producers.

It shares new insight into how the competition is organised and run, taking viewers through the complex processes and practices used to ensure that every aspect of the competition reflects the highest management standards.

Attention to detail

For those of us not involved, it seems like a mind-bogglingly complex task.

The AIOA receives 250-300 entries each year across three categories - Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Flavoured Olive Oil and Table Olives - from producers across the globe. Arriving at the stewarding warehouse over a seven-week period, the entries must be checked, tested where needed and, most importantly, de-branded for anonymity during judging. However, they also need to be readily identifiable by the stewarding team preparing the samples for judging. And the judging is carried out by expert panels around the world.

That's some juggling feat but, as the video shows, it's standard routine for the AIOA team, who operate under a 'detail is everything' mantra and make it all appear surprisingly straightforward.

Integrity assured

AIOA CEO Michael Southan said the video does a great job of showcasing the competition and the high standards by which it's run.

"It lets entrants see the detail involved, and in particular how exacting the stewarding process is," he said.

"It's meticulous: every 'I' is dotted and 'T' crossed to ensure the integrity of the competition and the judging process, and the best outcome for every entrant.

"Most important in that is the identification system, which sees each entry coded from receipt for anonymity. The brand name doesn't exist in any way until the results are prepared, which ensures that the competition's goal of judging every entry on its merits, without bias, is achieved.

"It's really impressive, and we're proud to be able to show people how that's done. It allows us to show potential new entrants in particular that, unlike a lot of other competitions, we're totally transparent about the way we run the AIOA and they can trust the integrity of their results."

Professional best practice

Southan said it also reflects the ethos of the Australian olive industry.

"The Australian industry aims to produce the highest quality of EVOO and the competition is integral to that purpose," he said.

"We hope the video gives people a sense of the professionalism and best practice that Australia operates under, not only through our production and the Australian



2026 AIOA entries now open

Entries for the 2026 Australian International Olive Awards opened on 1 June, with other important dates as follows:

- Entries close - Friday, 21 August
- Medal winners announced (via email) - Monday, 28 September
- Trophy winners announced - TBC

Enter via the competition website [here](#), where you'll find information on each of the Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Flavoured Olive Oil and Table Olive competitions, along with detailed instructions on how to pack and send your AIOA entry samples.

Standard but also by the way we assess olive oil quality to help all producers - both from Australia and overseas - determine the quality they have achieved and strive for continual improvement."

Watch and share

For previous AIOA medal and trophy winners, the video is a great way to share the story of the competition and the significance of your internationally-judged AIOA achievements. Take a look [here](#) - and then share it with your networks!

The AIOA video has been produced as part of the Olive levy project Australian olive industry communications and extension program (OL22000), funded by Hort Innovation, using the Hort Innovation olive research and development levy, co-investment from the Australian Olive Association and contributions from the Australian Government.